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ABSTRACT

This study was prepared by Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI). It is based on 115 hours of interviews with more than 100 of VFI's clients and a wide range of outside experts. The VFI interviews dramatically affirm the proposition that inner city youth between 16 and 19 are heavily prone to robbery and violence. Behind the rising siege of crime is demography: the changing age composition of the U.S. However, the difference between black and white crime rates is far too great to be explained by demography alone. Two of the other causes are the utter collapse of the system of juvenile justice and the increasing inaccessibility of entry level employment to dropout youths. Improving the predictability of the justice system is only a limited first step toward remediation of the problem. Even more important is to provide youth with the opportunity to go straight in a productive way, given the fact that there is an unemployment rate of 44% among inner city adolescents. These figures indicate that since the early 1950's black teenage unemployment has risen about three times faster annually than white unemployment. Approaches to solving the problem include an attack on the exclusive use of and heavy reliance on educational and testing requirements and other credentials. Job reform is also needed, as well as a more realistic assessment of the opportunities afforded by conventional schooling. (Author/AM)

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OUR TURN TO LISTEN

A White Paper on Unemployment, Education and Crime Based on Extensive Interviews with New York City Teenage Dropouts

ED152871

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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“I would just like for the politicians
without their cars, without their suits,
to put on a pair of jeans,
a T-shirt, and some pro keds,
and go down there into a neighborhood
that they wouldn't let their kids run through.
Just come down there and sit,
just that one day
besides playing golf or tennis,
and find out what's happening–
instead of assuming what we think.
Come down to a drug program,
come down to the barrio,
without your feds and policemen–
and listen.”

PREFACE

This white paper was prepared by Vocational Foundation, Inc., a private nonprofit organization established in 1937 for the purpose of finding jobs for young people with correctional backgrounds. The mission today is unchanged. All of VFI's clients are youths between 16 and 19, referred by courts, correctional institutions, schools and other accredited social agencies.

In recent years, VFI's staff has moved from concern to alarm about the plight of its young clients–particularly the increase in youth crime and the decrease in job opportunities for young people.

The study is based on 115 hours of interviews with more than 100 of VFI's clients and a wide range of outside experts, and reflects the more than 150 years of collective experience of the VFI staff in finding jobs for troubled youths. Some 46 hours of the interviews were videotaped and have been edited into a half-hour film dramatizing the predicament of jobless youth. The paper concludes with a list of key barriers to the job market for ghetto young people and proposes 10 "barrier breakers" to alleviate the problem.

The funds for this project were generously provided by friends of Vocational Foundation, Inc.

Listen to their voices. Speaking of survival and violence, sickness and even starvation, hopelessness and homelessness, expressing a profound and implacable cynicism. Child prodigies of despair. Listen to them. They are Americans and they will not go away. They are gathering and festering joblessly in all our major cities. As time passes, they become ever more deeply estranged from the laws and the institutions of our society.

Look into their young faces—their young hopes dying already in their eyes; comely faces, black, brown, some white; boys, girls; some of them laughing too raucously loud; some tormented with shyness and confusion; some anguished and angry; all part of a new generation of Americans who have looked into the heart of America's darkness—its inner cities—and found a cop on the corner telling them to move on, a teacher giving them lessons in fear and contempt, a courtroom taking from them their lingering sense of justice and equality.

Some of them line up daily at Vocational Foundation, Inc. (VFI) in New York. For 40 years VFI has specialized in finding jobs for troubled young people—nearly 3,000 of them every year. Never in VFI's long history have the jobs been so few, the young people so troubled, and VFI's leadership so frightened by the condition of their queued-up clientele. The VFI staff, collectively representing more than a century of experience in dealing with youth unemployment, is ready for the first time to declare a state of emergency—to declare that the problem is beyond their reach.

And yet the problem must be addressed. To this end the leaders of VFI have launched a multi-media project to investigate and explain the new crisis. Intensively interviewing scores of youths and a wide range of expert professionals, high-level officials, and street-level criminals, VFI found one central complaint: a fundamental and systemic failure to bring the new generation of inner-city youth into the adult world of jobs and families.

In the interviews, the young voices rise in angry rejection of all the usual pieties, be they liberal or conservative, that get invoked to explain their plight—from laziness and welfare glut to a need for more schooling. They denounce most of the favored programs, the doles and therapies, that are designed to improve their lives but more often stultify rather than help them.

What they want, in surprising unanimity, is work and responsibility. What they get, they say, is a "con" and a "shuffle". As one young person put it, "You ask yourself a question about the government. What do they really want? They want the poor people to stay poor."

"Fly" is one of these youths. He is a tall, black boy with soulful eyes and a smile just two incisors short of full toothsomeness. His basketball moves might have gotten him into college, if he could have made it through the ninth grade. He dropped out at 15 because, as he put it, "the teacher looked at me like I was a nothin'." At 16 he left home because "nobody wanted me hangin' around, you know. I mean, there was four of us. I was expected to leave, so I did."

Too young for welfare or work, too old for a foster home, bereft of family and support, he found himself in the usual dilemma of the street: a dropout desperado with a television dream. "Like I was the Pepsi generation, you know? All I wanted was a job and a house and like that, a car".

The street he moved onto was Kelly Street in the South Bronx. In a front page series in July, 1977, the *Wall Street Journal* described Kelly Street as a "battle zone," its largely gutted facades "a ghastly portent of things to come." Fly's dilemma was resolved by crime. "I had to survive," he said. "The only thing I was qualified to do was selling reefers and drugs."

PROFILE OF YOUTH

16 to 24 years of age, United States, October 1975

	(thousands)	(thousands)
Noninstitutional population		35,900
Enrolled in school	15,284	
Not enrolled in school	20,616	
Not enrolled in school		20,616
Employed	12,848	
Serving in armed forces	1,201	
Neither employed nor in armed forces	6,567	
Neither employed nor in armed forces		6,567
Less females 16-24 not in labor force		3,621
		2,946
Less males 16-24 not in labor force		690
Total unemployed males & females 16-24		2,256

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Later he committed some burglaries and snatched some purses. He remembers the first one. On his way home from a fruitless interview with a man at a printing shop, he saw "the bag hanging out there like she was some dude handin' off a football." He grabbed it and was surprised when its owner screamed. He doesn't like to steal, he says, but if a job doesn't turn up soon, he would "go out and rip off a TV." To Fly, as he frankly confesses with a rueful smile and no evident qualms, crime is often a way of life.

Even as Fly was interviewed, President Jimmy Carter and six other world leaders, gathered in London at an economic summit, found themselves unexpectedly embroiled in a consideration of how to combat "youth unemployment"—a problem that in widely different forms has arisen in most Western countries as the postwar "baby boom" came of age. The leaders publicly resolved to launch yet another campaign in the much-frustrated, many-fronted "war against poverty."

But the policies of welfare reform, designed to get "able-bodied men" off the welfare rolls, would have no effect on young men like Fly. Job programs, with few exceptions, repeat the failures of the past.

As a matter of masculine principle, these able-bodied men are not on the welfare rolls. Like every young man in VFI's interviews, Fly was utterly contemptuous of the welfare system: "Welfare is for people who can't help themselves," he said. Yet through intense questioning it was determined that he is currently an official welfare "recipient" as a dependent child in the case of his mother, but she does not give him money. A woman in her early thirties, she lives with "some dude" in a public housing project in the shadow of the Whitestone Bridge, expensive bus and subway miles from either work or detachable wealth. Fly has not stayed in her place since he left home, though his alleged presence was necessary to her housing application.

Fly's girlfriend and daughter also receive welfare payments and, whatever happens, he will be careful to keep out of their case—except as a man of "unknown residence". Any job he gets, if welfare officials knew about it, could jeopardize the income of both his mother and the mother of his children, depending on how the regulations are interpreted. Since Fly's "families" collectively receive some $12,000 every year in welfare and other benefits, no one is taking any chances. For himself, Fly's chief alternative to work is not the dole but "hustlin' " and crime. What he needs is a job that does not jeopardize his girl or mother, a job that takes him

altogether out of the competing systems of welfare and the street.

In waiting for such work, Fly is not holding his breath. Nonetheless, the world of work is trying to communicate, and Fly's eye is caught by the image on the television screen. It looks much like Fly himself: a young black man dressed in ragged denim and sneakers, loitering down a street that could be Kelly Street outside. The black man on the TV screen probes successively into the metal garbage cans, which are photographed with heavy symbolic emphasis. A black woman's rich gospel voice resounds above. "God Save the Children," she sings, "from hopelessness and despair. Gotta get an ed..joo..cay..shun or the jobs won't be there. God Save the Children." The man on the TV kicks one of the garbage cans and its top clatters down the alley. It is too late for him.

Then a bland voice burbles in: "In this complex, technological society, you have to get an education to qualify for a good job. Don't throw away your future. Don't drop out. Stay in school and get your high school diploma. Your future is too important to waste." The gospel voice returns, "God Save the Children." There follows the emblem of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. "This announcement is presented as a public service."

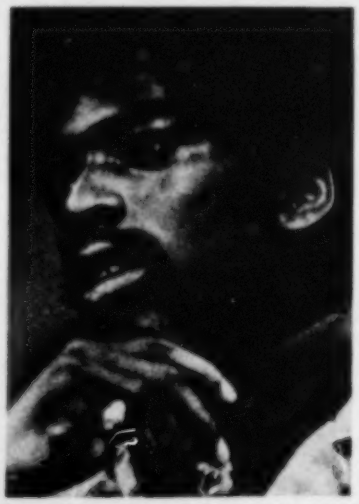
THE SCHOOLING MIRAGE

Stay in school? Like many youths of his age and background, Fly dropped out of school as a sophomore with only a sixth-grade education and a firm belief that school is a "joke." Interviews with others in the survey echo his belief. "You don't learn nothin' while you're there," one said, "and when you want to ask something, the teacher looks at you like you bugged." For most of these youths, school has been a miserable and sometimes humiliating ordeal that succeeds chiefly in teaching the lesson that school is not for them.

Fly does not think a high school diploma is a very helpful idea in his case. The government's TV ad seems, in fact, to be telling him and his kind to give up. "There are no jobs for dropouts."

Might the Carter Administration have other "public services" to offer him? Fly and his associates are not optimistic. They believe the political system is "racist," "corrupt," and uninterested in their problems. Like several other youths in the interviews, he cites Watergate and Patty Hearst and even South Africa to support his view that the system is in hock to the rich and powerful who live above the law—and that the promise of

"School? You don't learn nothin' while you're there and when you want to ask something, the teacher looks at you like you bugged."



economic opportunity is a "hoax," a "con," or a "racist ripoff."

The gap between Fly's world and the nation's political and economic system seethes with dangers for our cities. From that gap is issuing a new generation of potential rioters and street criminals, the largely fatherless offspring of a partly failed dream of black progress, and a new ghetto cycle of dependency and violence. From that gap loom the specters of hatred and revenge that now hover over many of our cities, separating black from white, old from young, haves from have nots, millions of Americans from the spirit of community and patriotism.

THE SYMPTOM OF CRIME

The plight of these youths demands urgent attention. On the most immediate and superficial level, there is the problem of crime. Although in the last two years juvenile crime across the nation has declined slightly, in New York State and among ghetto populations specifically it has continued to rise. Across the country, ghetto youths are between 10 and 20 times more likely than other young people to be arrested for violent offenses—from assault to murder. Between 1960 and 1975 arrests of juveniles for felonies more than tripled in New York State. In 1975 alone, an amazing 27 percent of the nation's arrests of juveniles for robbery took place in this state.

The VFI interviews dramatically affirm the proposition that inner-city youth between 16 and 19 are heavily prone to robbery and

THE JUSTICE LOTTERY IN NEW YORK CITY

	ARRESTS	INDICTED	CONVICTED	JAILED
NEW YORK CITY	5,625	3,223	1,310	223
BRONX	1,270	543	87	36
NEW YORK	2,196	789	359	105

ODDS AGAINST PUNISHMENT IF ARRESTED*

	New York City	Bronx	New York
INDICTMENT	1 to 2	1 to 2.5	1 to 2.7
CONVICTION	1 to 4	1 to 14	1 to 6
INCARCERATION	1 to 25	1 to 35	1 to 21

*Only an estimated 1 out of 3 felonies is reported. Therefore, these odds can be tripled to arrive at the probable correct figures.

YOUTH SENTENCES FOR MURDER IN NEW YORK CITY

16-19 YEARS OLD	18 months to 3 years
UNDER 16 YEARS OLD	one year

SOURCE: New York State Senate Crime Committee

violence. One does no service to the young people themselves—and certainly no service to their long-suffering victims in inner-city communities—when one downplays this lawless behavior.

Again and again, the youths testified to the casual commission of crimes.

"If I know the person, I'd maybe try and con them. But if I don't know them, and that's the only way to get some money, I just go ahead and rip them off, get it over with."

"I used to go to church to steal money from the plate, or statues and stuff. The preacher didn't care. He was just in it for the money."

"Boy, if I ain't got money, I do anything for money—selling dope, robbery, whatever it is."

"If you see somethin' you want and you get a chance to take it . . . you're a fool if you don't do it."

"I maybe break in somewhere and rip off a TV, a hi fi, or somethin'. I gotta survive."

"Like I become like an animal."

"Selling herb is the easiest life there is . . . until you get busted."

"I just didn't see no future in trippin' over bricks while drug pushers were droppin' out and living in big houses."

"I thought it was OK selling drugs."

"My parents didn't make enough money. I used to burglarize places that had the stuff I wanted. I didn't like people feeling sorry for me."

Crime has been a persistent part of life for most of the youths who were interviewed. Although most of them have since turned to other pursuits and many had found work through VFI, they say the new generation of ghetto youngsters are even more precociously criminal than themselves:

"If you think we're bad, you won't believe some of these kids."

"I look today at young people and it's sad . . . I don't see a lot of the games that used to be played. They're out there hustling. They're more aware of the vices going on out there. . . . Everybody growing up should have a childhood."

"They got 12-year-olds now out on the street mugging and selling dope."

"When I need money, I go to my little sister 'cause she hustles her ass off and keeps more money than I do."

THE DEMOGRAPHIC BULGE

What's behind this rising seige of crime? One explanation is demographic: the changing age composition of our society.

Violent crime, in all places and societies, is to a large extent a specialty of youth—and the number of American youth has been rising drastically. Between 1960 and 1970 the proportion of our population between the ages of 16 and 19 increased by 50 percent, to a level of nearly 17-million. Since then this age group has continued to grow in number every year, though at a slower pace. Under the best of circumstances, more teenagers means more crime, and more crime is what we have got. In fact, perhaps a third of our rising crime rate is attributable solely to the demographic bulge after World War II that came of age in the '60's and '70's.

The age-curve factor also accounts for some of the racial differences in crime. In the 1960's, while the portion of whites between 16 and 19 was growing by 50 percent, the portion of blacks in that volatile group grew by nearly 66 percent. Moreover, the number of black teenagers living in

the central cities expanded by 73 percent.

Nonetheless, the difference between black and white crime rates—a divergence of as much as 500 percent—is far too great to be explained by demographics alone. Some analysts ascribe the gap to "racism" in law enforcement, that policemen are far more likely to arrest black than white teenagers. Yet the gap has grown most rapidly during the very period when racism has been most decisively declining throughout the nation. The police bias theory also fails to account for the fact that the racial difference is almost as great in murder statistics, hard to falsify, as in the statistics of robbery and assault, where police discretion might play a part.

No, the phenomenon is real, and at least two of the causes are quite simple: the utter collapse of the system of juvenile justice and the increasing inaccessibility of entry-level employment to dropout youths. At present, in the lives of these young people, there is simply no clear pattern of rewards for good behavior and penalties for bad. There is no effective economic carrot and judicial stick to communicate to coming generations the values which the society upholds and expects its young to observe. For ghetto juveniles, the carrot has withered seriously. And the stick—the necessary discipline of civilized life—has almost completely disappeared into the maze and mockery of an overloaded, underfunded, cynically permissive system of family courts.

The society communicates to the next generation not the rules of the game but the futility of all rules. It tells ghetto youth they live in an amoral and anarchic world where you grab your own stick and rip off any carrots you can find, while your peers and associates form a lawless jury and applaud your guiltless return to the street.

In the end, one of the most powerful reasons for juvenile crime is that it pays . . . and pays . . . and pays. And the reason it pays is that no one seems to care enough to impose serious penalties. As one of the VFI youths, who has begun a successful marriage and career, put it: "When I was a kid rippin' off, man, I didn't know anybody went to *jail* for that stuff. You won't believe this, but nobody told me, man."

Perhaps no one told him about jail for juvenile crime because, by and large, it doesn't exist. The fact is that criminals under age 16—robbers, muggers, pushers, rapists, killers—in general do not go to jail in New York City.

In 1974 the New York State Select Committee on Crime investigated the cases of 98 juveniles arrested for robbery by police decoy

units. All the cases were referred to Family Court. Of the nearly 100 perpetrators, caught in the act by police, sentences were served in state juvenile facilities by only two. The committee found that the average juvenile robber had 10 felony arrests and 51 court appearances all without doing significant time. It found juveniles arrested for homicide who were released repeatedly to the streets.

Today about one in three felonies is reported, one in three reported crimes leads to an arrest, slightly more than half of all arrests lead to indictments, one in three indictments results in conviction, and one in six convictions ends in incarceration. This means that the average juvenile who commits a major felony has only one chance in a hundred of serving time. Even if he or she is convicted, and even if the crime is homicide, the average sentence is under two years. Adult drug traffickers and crimelords have been using early teenagers for their sales and strike forces, in the knowledge that nothing is likely to happen if the youths are caught.

This is our juvenile justice system. It is a scandal. The 32

"If you've only got a pair of jeans and your mother says, 'I don't care what you do, just keep them clean,' and you got to go to that interview and they're telling you 'I'm sorry, but you're not presented right and I'm not going to interview anybody who's not presented right.' And I'm supposed to stand there proud, right?"

"Most of the dudes I know, they're out in the street hustling . . . trying to make money in order to live."

sitting Family Court judges continue to plod through the swamp of an estimated 100,000 cases a year, involving 23,000 delinquent juveniles and perhaps 300,000 to 400,000 court appearances, or over 40 appearances per judge per day—an impossible burden even if every judge put in full days.

What this travesty of law and order manages to convey to the impressionable ghetto adolescent, growing up all too often without parental guidance or discipline, is one unmistakable message: society does not care about youth crime, so go ahead and do it. The message is spread and amplified within the gangs of unruly youth exploding from the demographic bulge, a message generalized and internalized in their minds as an exculpation: "Society itself is a sham, a fraud, a ripoff. We do it our way, they do it their way—but nothing matters, no one cares."

The millions of urban young people, black and white, who resist pressure from lawless peers need the firm assurance of the society that it is strongly on their side. There must be a system of criminal justice that inflicts swift and sure penalties on juveniles who rob and kill. As Dr. Walter N. Thayer, the father of VFI's chairman and then New York State Commissioner of Corrections, wrote in 1930: "When a reasonable percentage of crimes are followed by detention and a reasonable proportion of arrest by prompt trial, conviction and punishment, we can look for a large degree of the deterrent effect of the criminal law."

Most criminologists agree that youngsters should not be subject to some rigid scale of punishments that require long periods of

incarceration with adult offenders. As Dr. Thayer went on: "The crime for which the man was convicted is but the result—a culmination—of a set of circumstances—and making the penalty fit the crime is about as sensible as it would be to prescribe quinine for malaria and ignore the swamps which breed the mosquito carriers of the germ."

The VFI youths who had served time were unanimous in denouncing the mingling of hard-core criminals with impressionable young offenders. Youths should be sequestered and given training and therapy. It is not the harshness but the swiftness and sureness and dignity of the system that is the deterrent—the sense that crime has consequences and that the police and courts are not part of some foolish and reckless charade. Many of the VFI youths expressed a real hunger for discipline and authority. As one put it: "I needed an education. If somebody had kept a foot at my ass, I would have got it. But they didn't."

Improvement in the system of juvenile justice, from the courts to the reformatories, would help reestablish the balance of rewards and penalties—the carrot and the stick—by which society transmits its values to the young. Crime would no longer seem so acceptable. In the calculus of risk and rewards, the "straight" life would no longer seem so naive.

THE JOBLESSNESS EMERGENCY

But improving the predictability of the justice system is only a limited first step. Even more important in inducing youths to go straight is to provide inner-city teenagers with the opportunity to go straight in a productive way. If lawlessness is a symptom of the state of emergency of inner-city youth, the emergency itself is joblessness.

Most of these youths are high school dropouts. The aftermath of dropping out is a crucial period in their lives. Their market value is lowest; peer pressure is most intense; sex drives are most powerful. These teenagers, who have left the upward track of education, must be able to find a new way into adult society—a job—or they are likely to stay on the streets and find their way into crime.

This is a point on which the youth and expert witnesses all fervently agreed: jobs are the key. Most of the youth said that on occasion they have committed crimes and would resort to crime again "if it was necessary to survive". As a way of surviving, the young men all seemed to prefer crime to welfare, the small risk of jail to the assurance of "hassle" or

"humiliation" by social workers. But a job is a different matter, they said. Even Fly said he is seeking part time work, provided it will not be reported to the welfare authorities. In the past, he has done a variety of errands, paid in cash, for his girl friend's landlord and for a grocer down the street. When he works, he says, he does not commit crimes.

To observe a link between unemployment and many youth crimes is not to condone these offenses or accept without reservation the young people's glib rationales of "survival" and "starvation." Nonetheless it would be a mistake to deny that the swamp of the ghetto extenuates, if not breeds, much antisocial behavior.

The VFI interviews suggest that even the talk of "survival" is not just bravado. Unlike a middle-class child, who can usually depend on his family when he runs out of money, an inner-city child will often be on his own from an early age. Most of the youths interviewed have lacked any dependable family support since their middle teens, when they dropped out of school.

"Nobody wants to be bothered with these 12 year olds," said one young black boy, on his own since 15. "So the automatic fact is to let them do what's necessary to survive. . . . They go to homes, Hudson, Seriga . . . then they go to the street, and then they go to Rikers Island, to prison. And there you got a criminal. . . . Nobody wants to be bothered. Oh, well, they say, it's the fault of your parents. . . . But a lot of the time we ain't even really got parents." He, too, says jobs are the first priority. "When you ask why there is so much crime it's because there are a lot of people not working. . . . These

"I have to do something to survive. Y'know, to feed my baby and to feed myself."

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kids are on their own and they are desperate. They got to work."

If this view is correct, there is ample joblessness to account for high American crime rates in general and for soaring ghetto crime rates in particular. More than any other major industrial country, the United States has too long been failing to connect its young people with the job market. And even during the years of the great advances of the civil rights movement and the rise of affirmative action, the launching of the Great Society and the War on Poverty, the United States has done steadily worse in providing jobs for black youth, year after year.

THE GREATEST DEPRESSION EVER

There are nearly 2-million unemployed teenagers in America, black and white, comprising nearly one-fifth of the labor force between the ages of 15 and 19. In the ghettos, however, minority youths have an official unemployment rate of 44 percent; the Urban League suggests the real number is 60 percent. In the Bronx, where Fly lives, there are only 150,000 jobs for a total work force of 600,000 youths and adults; real youth joblessness and work-force withdrawal approaches two thirds. For minority youth, these are the years of a great depression, far worse in its impact on them than any depression which the country as a whole has ever encountered.

VFI statistics confirm this crisis. VFI clientele are all youths between 16 and 19 with a history of drug abuse, criminal activity, or other liabilities that make them virtually unplaceable in jobs by conventional manpower agencies. Some 80 percent are dropouts. Although they average 10.4 years of school, their tested reading level is approximately seventh grade, their math level sixth grade. Ninety percent are black or hispanic.

This VFI constituency is representative of the hard-core youth unemployment problem in New York City. Public manpower programs refer some of their hardest cases to VFI. Although historically VFI has been able to place approximately half of its applicants in jobs, this year the placement rate has dipped significantly lower.

As one VFI job developer put it: "All the middle-aged people who got their feelings hurt in the 1960's now seem to be getting even." Some businesses no longer advertise entry-level jobs in the newspapers for fear of being swamped with applicants jamming their switchboards and reception desks. Without newspaper ads, however, the agencies serving the inner-city poor have a hard time finding even the jobs that are available.

It is a mistake to confuse this situation with the general problem of youth unemployment that President Carter discussed in London with European heads of state alarmed by riots among jobless college students and by rates of youth unemployment under 10 percent. America's problem is in another league altogether. Our teenage jobless rate is higher than at any time since the 1930's, and is far higher than in any European state except Italy. Among middle-class Americans, youth unemployment is partly a cost of freedom and affluence: the cornucopia of educational options, the tendency to take a break between high school and college, the lessening pressure to marry or settle down. The problem is serious but it is fundamentally different in both character and effect from the predicament of ghetto youth.

A RADICALLY SEPARATE PHENOMENON

The most disturbing aspect of inner-city joblessness is its recent emergence as a radically separate phenomenon, with a life of its own, relatively unaffected both by general black progress and by conditions among other young people. As recently as the mid-1950's, black and white teenagers had approximately equal unemployment levels, and the blacks often showed rates of labor force participation higher than whites. Today, however, after 20 years of black economic progress and political gains, unemployment among black teenagers is almost two-and-a-half times the white rate, while their labor force participation has sunk to only 75 percent of the white level. These figures mean that since the early 1950's black teenage unemployment has risen about three times faster annually than white unemployment.

Youth crime, one-parent families, and youth joblessness have all risen by a factor of five since the middle 1950's. The coincidence is revealing and describes the vicious inter-related triangle of ghetto life.

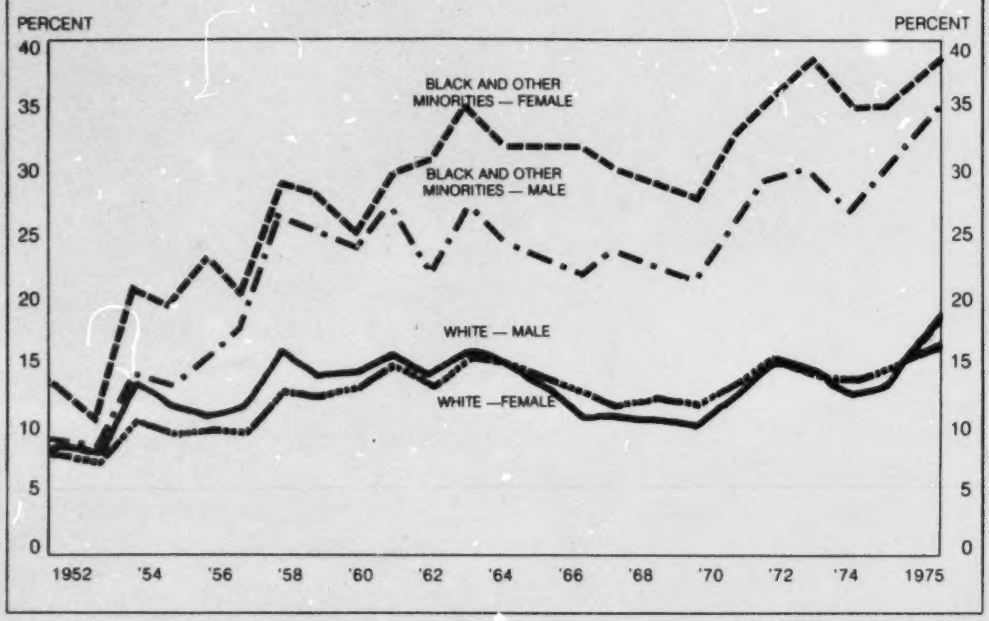
In responding to this new emergency, the failure of current approaches must be acknowledged. No campaign to get ghetto youth into the job force will succeed unless it is founded on an understanding of why previous campaigns have failed.

Why have inner-city youth become the chief victims of the system during the same period that the system so extensively focused on their needs and problems?

Why has black youth unemployment soared during the very decade that federal aid to blacks for special education and training catapulted upward 20-fold?

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES OF TEENAGERS (16–19), BY COLOR AND SEX

Annual averages, 1948–1975



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Why have job opportunities for black youths dried up during the very decade when "affirmative action" was mandated for every government contract; during the very years that blacks virtually closed the historic gap between the races in years of schooling completed; during the heydey of the Job Corps (59 percent black), the Neighborhood Youth Corps (44 percent black), Upward Bound (60 percent black), the Manpower Development and Training Act (30 percent black), the Work Incentive Program (WIN, 45 percent black), the Concentrated Employment Program, (CEP, 59 percent), the Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC, 90 percent), Opportunities in the Business Sector (JOBS, 41 percent), the Public Employment Program (20 percent), Public Services Careers (45 percent) and Operation Mainstream (20 percent)—to name just some of the ambitious government campaigns launched over the years at least partly to put people in the ghetto to work?

These programs in their entirety now cost nearly six-billion dollars annually, and involve perhaps 300,000 black teenagers. The

81 19

President and Congress are currently supporting comprehensive new legislation that for the most part simply expands on these previous efforts. Several of the experts we interviewed called for yet more ambitious programs of the same kind.

Yet the statistics do not bear out the proposition that programs involving 300,000 ghetto teenagers were merely too small to succeed. Although there are two-million jobless teenagers in America, the bulk of them are whites outside of poverty areas, mostly high school and college graduates with adequate job prospects in the long run. Within poverty areas, despite the egregiously high *percentages* of youth unemployment, the actual numbers of jobless youth do not seem unmanageably high. Official teenage unemployment, black and white *in* poverty areas, rural and urban, totals 322,000. Joblessness among out-of-school *ghetto* teenagers is officially counted at the surprisingly modest figure of 110,000. Even if the official figures are tripled—estimating that there are two discouraged and uncounted youths outside the work force for every jobless one in it—the current programs, which reach some 300,000 black youths annually, would seem to represent a substantial quantitative attack on the problem.

So the current programs would seem to be big enough. Yet they hardly make a dent.

Defenders of these programs maintain that half of the black teenagers covered in the statistics are involved only as recipients of summer jobs under the Neighborhood Youth Corps. Both VFI counselors and clients agree, however, that this program is so ineptly supervised that it is useless or worse as job experience. The youths called it a "shuffle" and a "farce." "Mostly the kids just go to the park or the beach and mess around for their money," one VFI counselor said. "They get the idea *that's* a job".

But even most graduates of the far more ambitious Job Corps fail to improve their employment rate much despite elaborate residential programs offering six months of vocational training and basic education at a cost as great as a school year at Harvard. The Job Corps does have some successes, chiefly in its union-sponsored apprenticeship effort. But like most of the other well intentioned and intelligently conceived programs in the catalog of the Great Society, it has in general failed to lead its clients into lasting jobs. And so, every year black teenage unemployment goes up, leaving more and more youngsters staring glumly at TV, gathering restively on street corners, or playing endless games of playground basketball, while the world passes by on the way home from work.

"When I was a kid rippin' off, man, I didn't know anybody went to jail for that stuff. You won't believe this, but nobody told me, man."

One reason for this cycle is that these black youth are in a trap that neither they nor its creators fully understand—and that the government "manpower" programs fail to address. That trap is a "Catch 22" employment system that excludes inner-city youth even while it prohibits discrimination against their race. In a historic irony, the very forces of rationalistic bureaucracy that outlaw racial bias have created a series of other biases that are far more effective in denying jobs to black youth. This new discrimination, moreover, is just as ethno-centric, just as rife with favoritism for the upper classes, just as deeply invidious to the poor, just as indefensible in economic terms, and nearly as destructive to our society as the crude bigotry of old.

THE NEW BIGOTRY OF CREDENTIALISM

In place of the bigotry of race has arisen a new bigotry of schooling, based on a series of half-truths about the link between education and work that demean our schools and stultify our personnel policy. Characterized by a worship of credentials, this system has created a school-marm meritocracy that blocks every route to the ladder up with the stern rule: You cannot pass if you cannot parse, if you cannot put the numbers in the right boxes at the requisite speed, if you cannot perform in the accustomed academic mode.

This system reaches its extreme in government civil service, where it has become a kind of religion of numbers in which faith in testing devices completely eclipses works. No matter how well you do on the

JOB BARRIERS

These youngsters–jobless ghetto teenagers, largely high school dropouts with correctional histories–face ten key job barriers:

1. Widespread use of the high school diploma—which they do not have—as "a passport to the job market."
2. Use of written tests for job qualification that closely resemble schoolroom exams—with which they cannot cope.
3. Child labor laws and workers compensation rules that bar them from night shifts, from working where liquor is sold, from using heavy machine tools, construction equipment, forklifts, and other tools common in today's work place.
4. Worksite insurance rates, associated with the workers compensation system, that are prohibitively high for those who might employ them and that in many instances raise the cost of employing them to a level substantially above the minimum wage.
5. Arbitrary age limits pertaining to drivers licenses and other licenses that exclude most of them from a wide range of jobs, from beautician to taxi driver.
6. Arrest records and correctional histories that bar them from employment, together with polygraph tests based on these data.
7. Age and education requirements that exclude them from apprenticeships.
8. Minimum wage laws that price them out of the job market.
9. Regulations relating to welfare, food stamps, medicaid, housing allowances, and legal assistance programs that tie benefits to joblessness and discourage them from working.
10. Just plain race and age discrimination.

BARRIER BREAKERS

A program to dismantle barriers to jobs and promotions for ghetto youth:

1. Make departure from school at age 16 coincide with the completion of a specific, certifiable phase of education.
2. Revise civil service laws to outlaw the use of written tests as the exclusive or final determinant for employment or promotion.
3. Revise those child labor laws which bar teenagers from a wide range of jobs, and develop a program to inform employers of their rights in hiring young people.
4. Revise workers compensation system and associated worksite insurances rates to remove effective financial penalties and other disincentives for the employment of young people.
5. Lower the age for drivers permits and other licenses when required for employment.
6. Enforce Supreme Court rulings—in Griggs vs. Duke and similar cases—against the use of tests and other qualifications, such as arrest records, that are "fair in form but discriminatory in operation."
7. Enlarge the use of Community Development Corporations to promote small businesses.
8. Counteract the minimum wage laws (and measures which effectively raise the cost of employing youths well above the statutory level) through the subsidy of employment by private industry of dropout teenagers under expanded on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.
9. Extend child allowances to working poor families as advocated in the President's welfare reform proposal; impose small charges for medicaid clients and extend medicaid to the working poor.
10. Employ youths for such jobs as rebuilding city neighborhoods, improving public parks and facilities, garbage collection, road repair, and services to older and dependent people through the privatization of certain governmental functions.

job you can't move up if your test score is too low; conversely, no matter how badly you do—nearly—you can't be moved out if your score is OK. In general, only the numbers count. The credentials problem showed up everywhere:

> "After they give me all the tests and I fill out all these papers, they tell me I couldn't do it because I don't have my diploma."
>
> "All I want to is repair your car, right? What they want me to do is take tests."
>
> "I'm unemployed 'cause I don't have the training. I got to go back to school."
>
> "It seems like most of the things my parents did coming up are illegal now. You need a license. You can't just sell stuff now."
>
> "I was working at the time and I was much more interested in my work than in school. But the counselor in school wanted me to quit my job, because I wasn't doing well in classes. But you can't go to school for the rest of your life, and I wasn't getting much out of it. I was learning more at work."
>
> "I wasn't qualified for nothin' but selling reefer."
>
> "I felt it was a waste of time, you know, trying to get an equivalency and not bein' taught nothing. . . . I wanted to do electricity. I wanted to know how to wire from here to there."
>
> "I was doin' the job good, but to get anywhere you have to pass all these tests."

Impelled by government and corporate personnel policy, the system year by year stretches its tentacles even further into the American working place. Year by year, the ante is raised: first a high school diploma, then a special test, then a further degree, finally a grant of virtual tenure for the "qualified," all with the effect of downplaying performance on the job and exalting effort on the test, all with the effect of protecting any schooled but shiftless members of the middle class from the competition of unschooled but aggressively hardworking poor people.

In short, the system depreciates the assets of diligence, determination, and drive to get ahead that have launched other groups into the middle class, and that every close study has shown to be most important to productivity. And it exalts the assets of the advantaged classes—schooling, testing, computing—that are often irrelevant to productivity in most jobs.

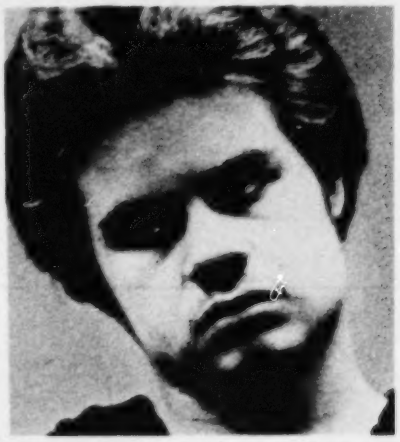
One result, as Herbert Beinstock of the U.S. Department

of Labor told VFI, is that "we have evolved a first job barrier in this country." The system ensures that ever larger portions of any unemployment in the American economy will be concentrated on the unacademic: chiefly high school dropouts, and especially black high school dropouts.

THE PROMOTION BARRIER

Even those who hurdle the first job barrier often run into the problem later on in the form of a promotion barrier: the same worship of credentials applied now to decisions about whom to move

"My parents didn't make enough money. I used to burglarize places that had the stuff I wanted. I didn't like people feeling sorry for me."



ahead. This second obstacle means that even larger numbers of jobs are seen as dead-end work and ever larger numbers of academic dropouts withdraw in discouragement from the work force. Few experiences, after all, are so demoralizing to a devoted worker as to see indifferent competitors leap ahead of him on the basis of credentials.

This is how the system worked for Fly. He left school at 16, halfway through his sophomore year. He had been officially suspended for selling marijuana to his classmates, but he had unofficially dropped out long before. "I can't blame the school," he says, "I was hardly ever there." When referred to VFI from Family Court, he initially refused to submit to testing. But under coaxing from the attractive blonde examiner, he finally consented. He registered a sixth-grade reading and a fifth-grade math achievement; he could add and subtract, read and write—laboriously. Yet his score on the Beta test, a simplified I.Q. ostensibly free from cultural bias, was 102, about average for the country.

Fly is rather typical of VFI's clientele, with slightly higher than usual "intelligence" according to the test, and considerable sharpness and wit according to his counselors. The I.Q. test indicated that, like most of the VFI clients, he dropped out of school from lack of motivation or a failure of the school to interest him rather than from any serious mental incapacity. With just a little training, on the job or elsewhere, it would have been possible for Fly to perform a large proportion—by some estimates, half—of all the jobs in America.

At times of need or crisis, the "unqualified" often perform above expected levels. Untrained blacks and women surged into the labor force during World War II and made key contributions to the war effort. Unschooled aliens and colonials who do not know the language of their host countries have performed high level work in the economy of many European nations, including functions normally reserved for college graduates in the United States. Contrary to widespread belief, academic attainments are of little real importance in performing most jobs. What education is required can be given selectively to motivated workers, who learn rapidly for some clear purpose. Yet every year more and more work is restricted to those with credentials or aptitudes that conform to artificial academic standards.

The lack of credentials is only one problem, one part of the unemployment trap for the dropout. The inner-city teenager is also excluded from many jobs by obsolete provisions in the child labor laws and

"All I'm trying to do is survive without getting into trouble . . . I went to jail once, and once is enough for me."

LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION

	BOTH SEXES 16-24	MEN 25 AND OVER	WOMEN 25 AND OVER
EMPLOYED	22.3%	42.7%	29.9%
LABOR FORCE	24.2%	46.3%	29.5%
UNEMPLOYED	46.2%	29.0%	24.7%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

While youths 16-24 accounted for only 22.3% of the nation's employed and 24.2% of the labor force, the constituted 46.2% of the unemployed in 1976.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Workmen's Compensation, by prohibitively high rates for youths in workplace insurance policies, and by union rules restricting eligibility for apprenticeship. His chances are further shrunk by high payroll taxes and minimum wage levels that encourage the use of machines and small numbers of highly skilled personnel. The United States is the only major industrial country that does not maintain lower minimum wages for teenagers than adults.

The VFI staff and the experts consulted, however, doubt that lower minimum wages are a correct answer for their clientele today, arguing that lower pay would reduce the attractiveness of jobs relative to other sources of money like welfare or crime. Still, they recognize the negative effect of minimum wage rates on the availability of jobs. Their answer, therefore, is to subsidize the employers of unskilled youths. This approach would retain the private sector's advantages for generating useful work while compensating employers for the risks they take in hiring unproven applicants. At present, the real cost of hiring youths is raised considerably above the minimum wage by higher insurance rates, and the value of these workers is reduced by laws restricting young people to daytime hours and prohibiting them from handling much modern machinery.

Even if an inner-city youth manages to surmount all the obstacles and approaches surrounding an entry level job, he may still be tripped by one final discredential: he is about ten times more likely than a middle-class youth to have an arrest record or correctional history.

A criminal record will flatly prohibit a youth's entry into many jobs and will effectively exclude him from many others. One youth asked plaintively, "Why do people condemn a man without understanding why he went to jail in the first place? Bad people accept you and protect you." One girl summed it up, "In the streets you can always find a home." Yet VFI Associate Director Jerry Ornstein has done a longitudinal study of 140 youths that fails to show any on-the-job differences in work performance between clients with and without correctional histories. Several of the businessmen who were most willing to hire youths with records testified that some of them were exceptionally diligent and loyal.

"There's a lot of things you walk by you say, 'I want that, I wish I had that.' If you get that chance you're going to definitely take it."

Once again, it seems that the first job barrier is based on bigotry rather than experience. VFI also finds that this bigotry is most deeply institutionalized in big businesses and government and least serious in the small businesses that give the most diverse and valuable training and personal attention to poor youth.

To sum up, an inner city youth like Fly, despite his intelligence, faces a gauntlet of significant obstacles to participation in the work force and movement into the mainstream of American society. The few jobs that are available—stock boy, messenger boy, mail clerk, McDonald's—offer low wages and few chances for promotions. To the job-seeking youth these appear to be dead-end drudgery. In fact, performance of such work with consistency and discipline is the best route these youths have to better

placements in other companies—but this reality is not evident to many of them.

Compare Fly's plight to the situation of a middle-class youth. He will undergo powerful family pressures to finish high school and go on to college. In college he may be heavily subsidized and encouraged by the government, whether in state institutions or through loans and scholarships. After college, he may be pressed to attend graduate or professional schools, again with heavy government aid. He will tend to delay starting a family for several years, usually until ready to join the job force. Marriage and childrearing thus come as both a result and a reinforcement of the commitment to work, as the man normally takes on a long-term responsibility for supporting his family. Thus do the academically adept find a powerful channel to the job force and to family responsibility, which they may enter at age 18 or several years later.

Moving into society at an earlier age, the dropout undergoes a radically different group of social pressures, pressures which lead him away from family responsibility and into the world of crime. And many of these perverse incentives come directly from government programs designed to deter crime or help the poor.

THE BAR TO MARRIAGE

In the first place, the ghetto dropout faces a near impossibility of marriage. He cannot marry because he cannot earn nearly as much as the welfare system and associated poverty benefits grant to a woman and child, and these benefits are mostly lost if he is reported as a working spouse. If he doesn't marry, on the other hand, his woman can keep all her benefits and he can retain all his earnings.

Other programs push the ghetto teenager further into dependency and crime. While the public schools often fail to prepare him for adult society, prisons and reformatories (which cost much more than college would for each inmate) serve as fully effective schools for crime, according to all VFI witnesses. While government job programs fail to lead to remunerative work, street crime can lead to a respectable income without submission to any arduous regimen, without substantial risk of serious punishment, and without exposure to a single written test. While heroin, as Fly knows, is deeply addictive and very expensive, the government offers the free alternative of methadone, even more addictive and more likely than heroin to cause death if mishandled. And though the risks of entrepreneurship in the straight world are increasingly foreclosed, organized crime offers good opportuni-

ties, without red tape or taxes, for the entrepeneur of adventurous bent.

Even in relatively trivial matters, government tends to act in largely irrelevant ways. Its somber TV warnings against dropping out mean little to young people who have been so utterly failed by school that they are, in practical terms, three grades behind even when they stay to graduate. Billboard exhortations to ghetto youths to spend their money on the state lottery and the "New York Bets" where "no one has a better chance than you" give these teenagers yet another reason to be contemptuous of society.

VFI's interviewees were lavish in their contempt. As one youth put it disdainfully, "The government controls us through methadone programs, welfare, and the schools."

GOVERNMENT POLICIES THAT CAN BE CHANGED

The fact that much of the problem comes from misconceived government programs, however, offers grounds for real optimism. The predicament of ghetto youth does not rise from some immutable historic trauma or mysterious social disorder or from the fundamental structure of the U.S. economy. The problem arises in large part from government policies that can be changed. The voices we hear dictate that they be changed *now*.

In devising new programs, it will be necessary to avoid the inviting pitfalls. There will be strong pressure from various interest groups, for example, to treat the situation as if it were simply an acute form of the general unemployment problem in America, as indicated by federal unemployment statistics, and open therefore to the usual governmental solutions and short-term economic stimuli. These have not worked, and they will not work.

At present, the economy provides jobs for more people and a higher percentage of the population than ever before in peace time. For the past decade, the U.S. has been creating jobs almost twice as fast as Europe. An unprecedented two thirds of all American households now have two jobs. But 59 percent of the new jobs created in recent years have gone to women—disproportionately white women with good credentials. The difficulty comes less from the size than the shape of the job market.

Some American politicians cite the situation of poor blacks as an argument for (1) pumping up aggregate demand through government deficit spending (which frequently, and ironically, benefits the federal agencies that rarely hire or train black youths), or (2) as a rationale for

new emergency public works programs (that do virtually nothing for teenage blacks), or (3) as the basis for a vast expansion of government employment (that would hurt most the small businesses that hire poor youth), or (4) as a reason for expanding the affirmative action agencies (though blacks now comprise only a small minority, 15 percent, of the persons covered, and though these agencies practice credential worship in the extreme). The current youth unemployment statistics and the VFI experience offer no grounds for justifying more of the same barren policies that were already in effect when inner-city kids lost their place in the U.S. economy.

JOBS FIRST, EDUCATION SECOND

One should even be skeptical of programs of compensatory education, particularly if they are used to reenforce the notion that job entry and promotion must inevitably be tied to academic achievement. Conventional schooling has never served or satisfied all the population, nor will it do so in the future. Recent studies by the sociologist Andrew Greeley and others indicate that, contrary to popular belief, previous immigrant groups succeeded first in earning money; it was subsequent generations that got the schooling.

VFI experience confirms the proposition that jobs come

"When I need money, I go to my little sister 'cause she hustles her ass off and keeps more money than I do."

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first. Once a client is working, he is more likely to accept educational programs. Even then, however, the inspiration of exceptional cases should not lead to unrealistically high expectations for programs that envisage poor youth overcoming their disadvantages by going to school on nights and weekends.

AN ATTACK ON CREDENTIAL WORSHIP

What is needed, first of all, is a frontal attack on credential worship itself—beginning at its major strongholds in government. Rating methods that do not allow these young workers to qualify for promotion by job performance are job barriers—and they are discriminatory as well as irrational.

"I'm not qualified for this,
I'm not qualified for that.
Hey, I'm not going to even work.

I'm qualified for selling
reefer and drugs.
That's all they look at
me as."

The exclusive use of and heavy reliance on educational and testing requirements should also be greatly reduced as a screening device for entry-level work. The welfare commissioner in New York City said recently he could not investigate many of his cases because he did not dare send his social workers into some ghetto neighborhoods. Asked why he could not hire investigators from the ghettos themselves, he said they didn't have the qualifications. Such requirements are obviously self-defeating. Social agencies should not be run like amateur night, but it is essential to create on-the-job programs whereby paraprofessionals can qualify for promotions without returning to school or passing exams in the academic mode. As one

dropout, now working for VFI said, "I can do anything, just give me the chance to prove it."

In attacking credentialism, the support of all civil rights agencies is needed, especially the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC). In 1971, in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlaws "not only overt discrimination but also practices that are fair in form but discriminatory in operation." Among such practices, the court specified, were both pre- and post-employment tests that were not job related, and company refusals to employ persons with arrest records. Such decisions lay the groundwork for a general attack on the rigidities in the employment systems that tend arbitrarily to exclude teenage blacks.

The VFI experience and interviews lead to the conclusion that there must be a reexamination of all the specific obstacles to employment of poor youth. These include the exclusion of persons with correctional histories, the obsolescent provisions of child labor laws, the arbitrary age limits on drivers' licenses and other work qualifications, arbitrary age provisions in workers compensation and workplace insurance policies, complicated work certificates, the Davis-Bacon Act and other measures that artificially increase wage rates or restrict the availability of apprenticeships. And, although a rise in the legal mandatory retirement age may be desirable in principle, until the current baby boom generation is absorbed into the work force, such a rise would exacerbate the problem. Beginning in the mid-1980's, the number of youth entering the job market will decline. Until then, labor economist Marsha Freedman warns VFI, any mandated move to later retirement would be "disastrous for young people".

A MATTER OF COMPENSATION

At present, youth employment is significantly inhibited by government policies, while middle-class youth education is heavily subsidized. A strong case can be made for subsidies for the employment and training of inner-city youths. These subsidies will not give young people a net advantage over their elders in seeking jobs; youths are already heavily and variously disadvantaged. Subsidy programs will merely compensate for some of the current reluctance of many employers even to consider teenage applicants, particularly from the inner-city.

In addition, the legal age for leaving school should be made to coincide with the ending of a recognized stage of education. Students

at 16 should be allowed to depart from school with a certificate rather than a stigma. And heavy job counseling assistance should be made available to them. Beyond very low minimum wages for young workers, the European countries with low youth unemployment all had comprehensive youth counseling services associated with the schools, large subsidized training and apprenticeship programs, and intensive job canvassing for each graduating class. Norway, France, and Britain open such programs to 14-year-olds. Sweden spends a four-times greater percentage of its GNP for employment training than the United States; but like all other European countries, it spends less than half as much as we do on academic education beyond age 16.

Special services should be extended to youthful offenders. VFI Director George G. W. Carson has written: "Our jails are already overcrowded. Even with stiffer penalties and mandatory commitments, people who commit crimes cannot be locked up forever. . . . What is needed now," Carson maintains, "is the leadership in making a commitment to really helping these youths. As a society, we must restore adequate, competent, and appropriate services to youths in trouble or in danger of getting into trouble." Clearly, as a mandated condition of incarceration, all youths must be given training and other appropriate services.

Successful American programs for on-the-job training and employment counseling at present suffer from erratic and uncertain funding. One youth says, "Every time I get involved with something I like, it happens every time, the money runs out." Many foundations and government agencies in this field operate under a mandate for novelty that sometimes leaves established programs in the lurch after they outgrow, in success, their own experimental stage. While seed money is still urgently needed for new ventures, U.S. youth services programs of demonstrated worth should be granted consistent long-term support. The problems of transition from school to work are not going to go away, and youth employment services will always need a large degree of government backing.

THE NEED FOR JOB REFORM

The plight of the VFI clients clearly shows that even the best services will not succeed, however, unless the current imbalance between welfare and entry-level work is redressed. In recent years much emphasis has been placed on improving the conditions of the welfare system, with the result that it has become more attractive to many than jobs. Now greater

WELFARE SUPPORT VS. MINIMUM WAGE SALARY

(Family of 4)

A family of 4 for one year on welfare:			*A family of 4 for one year on minimum wage salary:*		
INCOME:			INCOME:		
Welfare Income	$3,096		Salary (after tax)	$4,436	
Foodstamps	2,040		Foodstamps	2,040	
Total	$5,136		Total	$6,476	
EXPENSES:			EXPENSES:		
Housing	$1,500	(minimum)	Housing	$1,500	(minimum)
Health Care	2,000	(average)	Health Care	2,000	(average)
Total	$3,500	PAID (by welfare)	Total	$3,500	
NET	$5,136		NET	$2,976	

SOURCE: Department of Social Services Statistics

emphasis should be placed on improving the conditions of the job system. At present the welfare system offers food stamps, free medical care, legal assistance, sometimes housing, and, most important, a benefit schedule that expands in proportion to family size. A welfare recipient who goes to work at a reasonable wage loses all these advantages. It is vital to correct this injustice by developing assistance programs for working poor families.

One device used in every other major industrial nation is child allowance payments for each child in the family. If the family-busting effects of welfare are to be avoided, serious consideration should be given to adopting a child allowance system focused on the working poor with large families, as President Carter has proposed in his welfare reforms. At present, each new child in a family makes welfare yet more attractive than work, with the result that most large ghetto families end up on the dole and the children increasingly lose the inspiration and example of working parents.

Experience with these young people and their families indicates that a second adjustment of the conditions of work vis-a-vis welfare must focus on Medicaid. Currently worth an estimated $2,000 to every poor household (and perhaps even more in peace of mind), Medicaid is available almost exclusively to welfare recipients. This program alone makes work—or marriage to a worker—prohibitively unattractive to millions of American poor, and particularly so to those young women raising small children

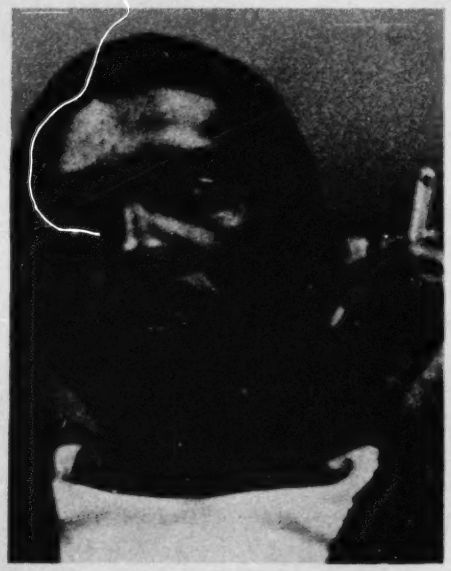
who also have heavy medical expenses.

One possible adjustment is to impose small payments for Medicaid services and extend them to the working poor. But whatever change is adopted, it should not include the use of billions of American tax dollars to pay people for breaking up their families or for refraining from marriage. The Carter welfare proposals, despite rhetoric to the contrary, will have little effect on this problem as long as Medicaid and other poverty benefits are suspended if one gets a job or marries a worker. And the proposal's job requirement will have no effect on able-bodied men like Fly who are not on the welfare roles but who live off women who are.

Programs for the reform of work and welfare, the removal of job barriers for youth, a crusade against credential worship, and the creation of special subsidized training for young people, all will not *solve* the problems of inner-city youth. But they will rectify the current irrational biases in the system that ensure that unemployment will always be concentrated exorbitantly on this group.

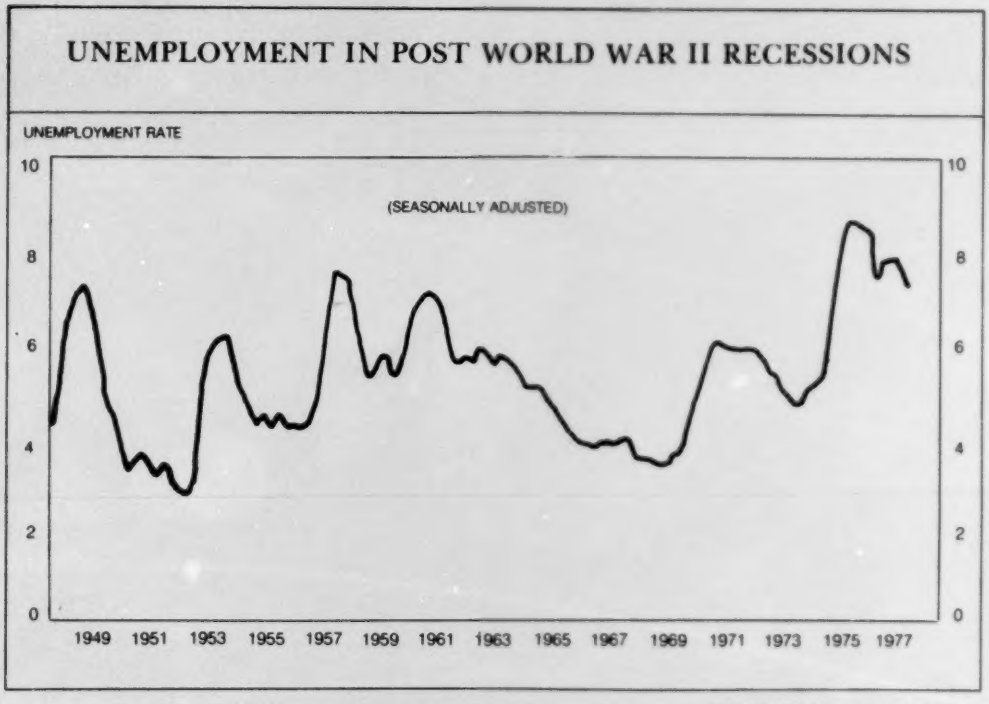
In earlier periods when racism was far more prevalent, black and white youth had approximately even rates of unemployment and labor force participation, as well as levels closer to those of white adults. In most foreign countries, the gap between youth and adult unemployment has been less than half the American gap. There is no reason why elimination of

"My life was normal up to the age of 12 . . . and then life changed. I started playing hookey, smoking reefer, drinking, hanging out . . . started committing crimes, started going to jail."



some of the rigidities in the labor market will not allow a similar pattern here.

Part of the policy for removing rigidities should be the strengthening of small business opportunities. According to VFI staff, small businesses, in general, not only are more accessible to inner-city youth but also offer a more valuable work experience. The youth gets more personal attention, he can learn more diverse and less narrowly specialized skills, and is



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

usually allowed more flexibility in work routines.

Small businesses were a prime avenue to upward mobility for previous generations of poor city dwellers—the chief route to upward mobility for every new ethnic group in America's cities from the Irish and the Jews through the Chinese and Japanese, on to the Cubans and Puerto Ricans.

Yet in recent years, small business opportunities have been declining in most American cities and black ownership of businesses has diminished. While a major effort should be made to induce large corporations to deal with this problem by adopting personnel policies more like those of small businesses, there should also be expanded programs to promote the creation of small businesses themselves, particularly in minority areas. One

useful approach: privatization of such governmental activities as garbage collection, road repair, and youth services, whenever feasible, thus circumventing civil service credentialism and creating new opportunities for minorities to profit from serving their own communities.

THE EXERCISE OF POWER: C.D.C.'s

In this effort to provide ghetto entrepreneurship, Community Development Corporations can be helpful. For all their expense, these institutions can be usefully employed to combat the decline of inner-city small business. Part of the problem of inner-city youth is a feeling of hopelessness about the economy and the black role in it. C.D.C.s can offer vivid examples of blacks exercising economic power *in* the community itself. The power of example, often absent in ghetto families dependent on welfare, can be a great engine of economic movement.

The VFI youth all emphasize that what they want is a bigger slice of the pie. "Older people," they say, "don't remember the problems they had when they were our age. . . . Some have forgotten what it's like to be poor, now that they're making it." Many of the youths stress their preferences for real jobs in the private sector over make-work "shuffling" in government.

Since World War II, every American recession has left behind it a larger residue of unemployed teenagers. Since the early 1960's, that residue has been disproportionately black. With joblessness among ghetto teenagers now near 50 percent and many large cities steadily losing entry-level jobs, minority youth from poor families are in a state of emergency.

VFI believes that cooperation among government, business, and labor can meet this crisis. But first each group must recognize the paramount national interest in bringing the new generation of ghetto youth *into* the work force. The problem is manageable if other interests are temporarily subordinated. Continuation of current practices will bring inevitable tragedy: a series of lost generations of minority youth—the strange fruit of insidious new forms of bigotry.

If we act decisively, we can turn to other priorities in the future. Failure to act will extend the vicious triangle of joblessness, family breakdown, and crime into future generations, regardless of the availability of jobs. The mandate of both morality and emergency is to listen to the children. And now it is our turn to listen.

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APPENDIX

Barrier Breakers in Detail

1. Make departure from school at age 16, after finishing at least nine grades of schooling, acceptable as marking the completion of a specific certifiable phase of education.

The New York State Legislature should amend *State Education Law 3204*, which sets forth general requirements for high school graduation, so as to award students leaving school at age 16 a basic educational certificate (or diploma), if they have completed nine grades and demonstrate more interest in working than in pursuing the usual academic courses.

The law should be amended to establish this certificate as sufficient for all purposes of age-related eligibility for employment, to replace the current Full Time Certification of Eligibility for Employment, and other employment and age certificates or permits.

New York State Regulation of the Commissioner of Education, Section 100.1 should be changed to include specific curriculum requirements for this new educational certificate.

The Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 should be amended to focus on job preparation and counselling activities at the school level, and to coordinate them with job creation and training programs under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and the Career Education Incentives Act. At present, only one counsellor is available, mostly for college-bound seniors, for each 1,000 high school students. Job counselling services should be a permanent presence in the school environment.

Students leaving school at age 16 should receive the cooperation and advice of officials of the State Employment Service. This system should return to its earlier practice of outstationing employment counsellors in the schools, and should equip these counsellors with computer terminals connected to central job banks being developed under CETA and related state programs.

Students leaving school with basic educational certificates could also receive vouchers which would be convertible until age 18 for approved vocational apprenticeship or other on-the-job training programs, as an alternative or supplement to subsidies recommended in Barrier Breakers 4 and 8. Thus, the tax allocation for basic education could be extended to students who leave the educational system.

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2. Enforce the Supreme Court decisions–in Griggs vs. Duke and similar cases–against the use of tests and other qualifications, such as arrest records, that are "fair in form but discriminatory in operation."

Griggs vs. Duke Power Company, in which the U.S. Supreme Court interpreted Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, holds that an employer cannot place conditions on employment, such as tests and educational credentials, unless they are demonstrably relevant to the particular job and are not "discriminatory in operation." In lower court cases, this principle has also been applied to arrest and conviction records. In addition, Federal courts have held that it is a violation of due process under the 14th Amendment to engage in an irrebuttable presumption with regard to conviction records.

These principles provide a possible basis for important litigation against various rigidities: irrelevant tests and credentials, and irrebuttable presumptions of the Civil Service system and other personnel policies that unnecessarily restrict many jobs to persons with academic skills. Federal and state agencies enforcing civil rights laws and other anti-discriminatory statutes should act vigorously wherever possible against these new forms of bias in our laws and policies.

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3. Revise child labor laws which bar teenagers from a wide range of jobs, and develop a program to inform employers of their rights in hiring young people.

Child labor laws at the federal and state level create a class of employees between 16 and 18 years of age subject to hundreds of complex, confusing, and overlapping regulations that cause many employers to discriminate categorically on the basis of youth, in possible violation of laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age. These child labor laws effectively exclude dropout teenagers from most American industrial and construction worksites. The establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reduces the need for such special protection for minors.

Legislatures in states like New York, with child labor laws (i.e. New York State Labor Law Section 133) that duplicate or exceed the coverage of federal statutes, should bring state laws into conformity with the Federal Fair Standards Act.

Federal and state laws applicable to out-of-school employees under age 18 should be revised and simplified to remove the deterrent effect on youth employment and reduce the current proliferation of prohibited and restricted occupations, hours, and equipment. (For example, New York State law excludes minors under 18 from "any occupation at construction work," including "painting from an elevated surface," while federal law regarding construction sites is more limited. Such laws should be rescinded.)

U.S. and state officials involved in counselling dropouts should take a positive attitude toward their efforts to secure jobs: and information programs should be developed to apprise employers of their rights and duties in giving jobs to minors. Employers should be informed that categorical exclusion of dropout youths under 18 may constitute illegal discrimination under federal and state civil rights laws.

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4. *Expand on-the-job training (OJT) and apprenticeship programs in private industry, under contracts with government and under the supervision of private non-profit organizations with proven capability in the field.*

Amend Title I and Title III of CETA to allow more extensive on-the-job training for dropout teenagers, and coordinate this effort with increased permanent in-school presence of State Employment Service (as recommended in Barrier Breaker 1), and with expanded programs for cooperation among business, labor, and non-profit organizations in hiring and training these youths.

OJT programs (under which government pays half ot the training costs) now comprise only 8 percent of CETA Title I funds, and many localities offer no special assistance for minors leaving school. Yet subsidized OJT, under contracts between CETA prime sponsors and private industry, is the best currently available instrument for bringing dropout youths into the private sector where four-fifths of the jobs are found. Performance under OJT contracts can be monitored by private non-profit organizations that specialize in easing the transition between school and work for disadvantaged teenagers.

The nation's largest program of this kind is Chicago's Alliance of Business Manpower Services (CABMS), which in fiscal 1977 is expected to provide over 30,000 OJT jobs with more than 550 employers. Using a major accounting firm to simplify OJT procedures and reduce red tape, and employing management trainees to market the program, CABMS in two years has reduced approval time on OJT contracts from several months to 10 days, has substantially cut administrative costs, and has quadrupled Chicago's OJT activities. Although this effort differs from VFI's, in that only one-fifth of the Chicago trainees are under 22, there is no evidence of "creaming." CABMS clients are overwhelmingly minority dropouts without jobs for the last six months. Three-quarters of the contracts are with small businesses where the trainee-to-employee ratio is 1:4 or 1:3, and half of all the companies are minority-owned. Most of the training lasts between three and nine months, and costs less than $3,200. Few of the jobs involve unions or official apprenticeships, though union leadership participates regularly in CABMS. Retentions and positive turnovers to other jobs are estimated at more than 65 percent in the programs.

Programs of this kind, based on cooperation between business, labor, government, and non-profit organizations, should be launched in major American cities and focused on the problems of the minority high school dropout. Businesses reluctant to hire disadvantaged youths because of the many special costs and disincentives, nonetheless will be more encouraged to participate in subsidized OJT with the assistance of non-profit intermediaries like CABMS and VFI.

These programs will require approximately one-billion dollars of additional money for Title I and Title III of CETA—much of which could be shifted from Title II Public Service Employment and from Public Works funds, far less cost-effective in delivering jobs to the disadvantaged.

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5. *Revise compensation and associated worksite insurance programs to remove disincentives and financial penalties for the employment of unskilled youths.*

At present, the Workers Compensation system operates in conjunction with child labor laws to deter employment of minors between 16 and 18 years of age. In New York State, for example, section 14a of the Workmen's Compensation Law imposes double compensation penalties, for which the employer himself is exclusively liable, in the case of any minor illegally employed. Simplification of child labor laws, as recommended in Barrier Breaker 3, would reduce the deterrent effect of this provision.

In conjunction with workmen's compensation, employers are required to grant non-occupational disability benefits for off-the-job injuries and illnesses. These insurance rates tend to be higher for unskilled youths in entry-level jobs than for other employees. Automotive insurance rates, prohibitively higher for youths, also ex-

clude them from many jobs which entail driving.

Together with steadily increasing payroll taxes, these insurance rates and penalties impose a heavy burden on employers of unskilled youths and create heavy artificial incentives for the purchase of labor-saving machinery or the employment of older or more skilled workers.

Programs granting subsidies for youth employment and training (see Barrier Breakers 1, 4, and 8) should be set at levels that fairly compensate for the deterrent effects in these insurance programs.

Employers of youths 16 to 19 should be exempted from any increases in workplace insurance rates or payroll taxes until this exceptionally large generation of youth is absorbed into the workforce. Otherwise these programs would have the effect of discouraging creation or expansion of labor-intensive businesses that tend to employ disadvantaged teenagers.

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6. *Increase use of Community Development Corporations (CDSs) to promote small businesses.*

CDCs have great potential for attracting and maintaining job-creation in the inner-city. In addition to providing jobs for teenagers, CDCs provide a unique opportunity for the private and public sectors to organize together to revive neighborhoods. CDCs have many advantages over other forms of community development programs. They are private and involve the people of the community—including youth. At the present time, however, funding to accomplish this objective has been inadequate, and there is a need for significantly higher levels.

VFI suggests an additional $12-to-$22-million for Title VII of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 in its supplemental appropriation bill for 1978, (or a total of $60-to-$70-million appropriation). In 1977, $48,170,000 has been appropriated to CDCs. This is insufficient.

State and local governments should assist in the funding of CDCs through efficient local use of federal community development funds; subcontracting of city services (as urged in Barrier Breaker 8); better use of existing economic advisory service and tax credits; and possible establishment of state community development finance corporations.

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7. *Extend child allowances to working poor families as advocated in the tax supplement or credit proposals in the President's welfare reform plan; impose small charges for Medicaid clients and extend Medicaid to the working poor.*

Welfare and Medicaid together create strong disincentives against marriage and work. To break this vicious cycle it is necessary to improve the benefits of work to fathers in sizable families. This can be accomplished by: (1) adopting a system of federal payments for each child, thus expanding a worker's earnings in proportion to family size, as now only the welfare system does; and (2) imposing on welfare recipients a small but significant payment schedule for Medicaid, and extending the program to working poor families.

These measures of welfare and Medicaid reform are more important for their impact on welfare. They would mean that for the first time since the middle 1960's a working poor family would exceed a welfare family in earnings and benefits.

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8. *Promote employment of youths for such jobs as rebuilding city neighborhoods, improving public parks and facilities, collecting garbage and other refuse, repairing roads, and extending services to older and dependent people, where possible under contracts for "privatization" of suitable governmental functions.*

For many reasons—civil service regulations, union opposition, political pressures, and bureaucratic regidities—governmental line departments have shown great resistance to hiring or promoting youths without high school diplomas. Even Public Service Employment under CETA Titles II and VI rarely goes to dropout teenagers, and programs specifically designed for this group (like the Neighborhood Youth Corps, now under Titles I and III) rarely offer a disciplined or realistic work experience because all meaningful work is protected by Civil Service and union rules.

There are two ways to attack these barriers: *directly* (see Barrier Breakers 10 and 2), and *indirectly*, by farming out certain government activities to private or non-profit organizations. This method, known as "privatization," is used in hundreds of American localities for functions as diverse as accounting services, road repair, and zoo maintenance, and usually yields substantial productivity gains. It has also proved to be a useful device for providing childcare in Minnesota, financial services in Orange County, California, fire protection in Arizona, property tax assessment in Ohio, and public transportation, garbage collection, and road repair in many cities from Boston to Los Angeles.

Combined with expanded OJT subsidies under CETA Title I and III (as recommended in Barrier Breaker 4), and affirmative action programs (Barrier Breaker 2), privatization offers good opportunities for promoting employment for teenagers without high school diplomas. Firms contracting with the government could be required to commit themselves to substantial levels of participation in OJT programs for disadvan-

taged youths. Local governments with large populations of unemployed youths should explore privatization plans linked with OJT subsidies.

9. *Lower the age for driver's permits and other licenses when required for employment.*

Licensing is used to protect the public, but it is also used to discriminate against teenage job applicants by effectively barring them from certain jobs. Age and academic requirements for licenses, especially those set at age 18, tend to be arbitrary and not related to ability or performance.

The New York State Legislature should amend the Vehicle and Traffic Law of the State, Article 19, Sections 501 through 509, to lower from 18 to 16 years of age the required age for drivers' permits when used on the job. All licensing laws should be re-examined and held to the test of ability and job relatedness.

10. *Reform civil service laws to outlaw the use of written tests as the exclusive or final determinant for employment or promotion.*

Civil service testing procedures, which closely resemble schoolroom examinations, have the effect of excluding most high school dropouts from government work and barring the promotion of the few who are accepted at the entry level. This bias in favor of the academically adept is heavily reinforced by educational credentials at higher levels that make government work the epitome of the demoralizing dead-end job for the rare high school dropout who manages to get hired. Rules that require selection of one of the top three eligibles necessarily exclude all "bad testers" without educational credentials no matter how well they perform on the job or what leadership capabilities they show. This system and similar private and military personnel policies discriminate heavily against disadvantaged youths.

Civil Service laws at city, state and federal levels should be reformed to allow the hiring of substantial numbers of disadvantaged youths under affirmative action programs and the promotion of "bad testers" on the basis of job performance.

Similar reforms are needed in the Armed Services, together with special remedial education for applicants who otherwise cannot pass entrance tests. The peacetime military is increasingly moving itself beyond the reach of the dropout teenagers it has always used so readily in wartime.

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